Renaissance magic

Renaissance humanism (15th and 16th century) saw a resurgence in **hermeticism** and Neo-Platonic varieties of **ceremonial magic**.

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Artes magicae

The seven *artes magicae* or *artes prohibitae*, arts prohibited by canon law, as expounded by Johannes Hartlieb in 1456, their sevenfold partition reflecting that of the artes liberales and artes mechanicae, were:

1. nigromancy ("black magic", demonology, derived, by popular etymology, from *necromancy*)
2. geomancy
3. hydromancy
4. aeromancy
5. pyromancy
6. chiromancy
7. scapulimancy

The division between the four "elemental" disciplines (viz., geomancy, hydromancy, aeromancy, pyromancy) is somewhat contrived. Chiromancy is the divination from a subject's palms as practiced by the Romani (at the time recently arrived in Europe), and scapulimancy is the divination from animal bones, in particular shoulder blades, as practiced in peasant superstition. Nigromancy contrasts with this as scholarly "high magic" derived from High Medieval grimoires such as the *Picatrix* or the *Liber Rasielis*.

Necromancy

Necromancy or demonic magic is a black art usually performed in the night dealing with dark phenomena such as raising the dead. Using necromancy for divination is through a genocide using blood and corpses. Due to these acts, it is forbidden and goes against the Christian faith. The art and practitioners are not received well in philosophy as it destroy religion and taints a person's morals.

Since demons enjoy blood, practitioners would experiment with human blood and flesh to obtain a demon's service. Hydromancy can be used alongside necromancy using the purity of children five to seven years old, repeating after their master's incantation over human blood or bones. The product deceives others through illusions such as transforming a person into animals.[1]

Practitioners in the late Middle Ages usually belonged to the educated elites due to the contents being written in Latin onto books. Demonic magic was usually performed in groups surrounding a spiritual leader in possession of necromantic books. One such case in 1444, Inquisitor Gaspare Sighicelli took action against a group active in Bologna. Marco Mattei of Gesso and friar Jacopo of Viterbo confessed to taking part in magical practices.[2]

Geomancy

The art of geomancy was one of the more popular forms of magic that people practiced during the renaissance period. Geomancy was a form of divination where a person would cast sand, stone, or dirt on the ground and read the shapes. The Geomantic figures would then tell them "anything" based on geomancy charts that were used to read from the shape.[3]

Hydromancy

Hydromancy, a form of divination using water is typically used with scrying. Water is used as a medium for scrying to allow the practitioner see illusionary pictures within it. Hydromancy originated from Babylonia and was popular during Byzantine times whereas in medieval Europe, it was associated with witchcraft.[4]

Aeromancy

Aeromancy divination consisted in tossing sand, dirt, or seeds into the air and studying and interpreting the patterns of the dust cloud or the settling of the seeds.[5] This also includes divination coming from thunder, comets, falling stars, and the shape of clouds.[1]

Pyromancy

Pyromancy is the art of divination which consisted of signs and patterns from flames. There are many variations of pyromancy depending on the material thrown into a fire and it is thought to be used for sacrifices to the gods and that the deity is present within the flames with priests interpreting the omens conveyed.[5]

Chiromancy

Chiromancy is a form of divination based on reading palms and based on intuitions and symbolism with some symbols tying into astrology. A line from a person's hand that resembles a square is considered a bad omen whereas a triangle would be a good omen. This idea comes from the trine and square aspect in the astrological aspects.[6]

Scapulimancy

Scapulimancy was a form of divination using an animal's scapula. The scapula would be broken and based on how it was broken, it could be used to read the future. It was generally broken by heating it with hot coals until it broke.[7]

Renaissance occultism

Both bourgeoisie and nobility in the 15th and 16th century showed great fascination with these arts, which exerted an exotic charm by their ascription to Arabic, Jewish, Romani, and Egyptian sources. There was great uncertainty in distinguishing practices of vain superstition, blasphemous occultism, and perfectly sound scholarly knowledge or pious ritual. Intellectual and spiritual tensions erupted in the Early Modern witch craze, further reinforced by the turmoils of the Protestant Reformation, especially in Germany,

England, and Scotland. The people during this time found that the existence of magic was something that could answer the questions that they could not explain through science. To them it was suggesting that while science may explain reason, magic could explain "unreason".[8]

C. S. Lewis in his 1954 *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* differentiates what he takes to be the change of character in magic as practiced in the Middle Ages as opposed to the Renaissance:

> Only an obstinate prejudice about this period could blind us to a certain change which comes over the merely literary texts as we pass from the Middle Ages to the sixteenth century. In medieval stories there is, in one sense, plenty of "magic". Merlin does this or that "by his subtilty", Bercilak resumes his severed head. But all these passages have unmistakably the note of "faerie" about them. But in Spenser, Marlowe, Chapman, and Shakespeare the subject is treated quite differently. "He to his studie goes"; books are opened, terrible words pronounced, souls imperiled. The medieval author seems to write for a public to whom magic, like knight-errantry, is part of the furniture of romance: the Elizabethan, for a public who feel that it might be going on in the next street. [...] Neglect of this point has produced strange readings of *The Tempest*, which is in reality [...] Shakespeare's play on *magia* as *Macbeth* is his play on *goeteia* (p. 8)

The Hermetic/Cabalist magic which was created by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino was made popular in northern Europe, most notably England, by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's De *occulta philosophia libra tres.* Agrippa had revolutionary ideas about magical theory and procedure that were widely circulated in the Renaissance among those who sought out knowledge of occult philosophy. "Agrippa himself was famous as a scholar, physician jurist, and astrologer, but throughout his life he was continually persecuted as a heretic. His problems stemmed not only from his reputation as a conjurer, but also from his vehement criticism of the vices of the ruling classes and of the most respected intellectual and religious authorities." While some scholars and students viewed Agrippa as a source of intellectual inspiration, to many others, his practices were dubious and his beliefs serious. The transitive side of magic is explored in Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia*, and at times it is vulgarized. Yet in Pico and Ficino we never lose sight of magic's solemn religious purposes: the magician explores the secrets of nature so as to arouse wonder at the works of God and to inspire a more ardent worship and love of the Creator. "Considerable space is devoted to examples of evil sorcery in De occulta philosophia, and one might easily come away from the treatise with the impression that Agrippa found witchcraft as intriguing as benevolent magic"[9]

Baroque period

The study of the occult arts remained widespread in the universities across Europe up until the Disenchantment period of the 17th Century. At the peak of the witch trials, there was a certain danger to be associated with witchcraft or sorcery, and most learned authors take pains to clearly renounce the practice of forbidden arts. Thus, Agrippa while admitting that natural magic is the highest form of natural philosophy unambiguously rejects all forms of ceremonial magic (goetia or necromancy). Indeed, the keen interest taken by intellectual circles in occult topics provided one driving force that enabled the witchhunts to endure beyond the Renaissance and into the 18th century. As the intellectual mainstream in the early 18th century ceased to believe in witchcraft, the witch trials soon subsided.

List of authors

Renaissance authors writing on occult or magical topics include:

Late Middle Ages to early Renaissance

- Johannes Hartlieb (1410-1468)
- Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499)
- Thomas Norton (1433–1513)
- Johann Georg Faust (1480-1541)

Renaissance and Reformation

- Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)
- Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494)
- Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535)
- Paracelsus (1493–1541)
- Georg Pictorius (1500-1569)
- Nostradamus (1503–1566)
- Johann Weyer (1516–1588)
- Thomas Charnock (1524–1581)
- Judah Loew ben Bezalel (1525–1609)
- John Dee (1527–1608)
- Giordano Bruno (1548–1600)
- Edward Kelley (1555–1597)

Baroque period

- Basil Valentine (pseudonym for one or more 16th-century authors)
- Nicolas Flamel (1330-1418- published since 1612)
- Heinrich Khunrath (1560–1605)
- Michael Sendivogius (1566–1636)
- Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639)
- Jan Baptist van Helmont (1577–1644)
- Franz Kessler (1580–1650)
- Adrian von Mynsicht (1603–1638)
- Sir Kenelm Digby (1603–1665)
- Johann Friedrich Schweitzer (1625–1709)
- Isaac Newton (1642–1727), see Isaac Newton's occult studies

See also

- Alchemy
- Baroque philosophy
- Character (symbol)
- White magic
- Continuity thesis
- *Hieroglyphica*
- History of magic (disambiguation)
- History of science in the Renaissance
- Kabbalistic astrology
- *Key of Solomon*
- *Natural Magic*
- Medieval European magic
- Scientific revolution
- *The Book of Abramelin*

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4. Luck, Georg. *Arcana Mundi : Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Collection of Ancient Texts* (2nd ed.). The Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 312.
5. Luck, Georg. *Arcana Mundi : Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Collection of Ancient Texts* (2nd ed.). The Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 311.
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8. Dawes, Gregory. "The Rationality of Renaissance Magic" (http://muse.jhu.edu.libproxy.mst.edu/article/537218). *Paregon*. **30**.
9. John S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic & the Return of the Golden Age*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

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External links

- Renaissance Magic, BBC Radio 4 discussion with Peter Forshaw, Valery Rees & Jonathan Sawday (*In Our Time, Jun. 17, 2004)*

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